

TOP 15 CARIBBEAN ALL-INCLUSIVES P. 18

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P. 68

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CAYMAN BRAC

Nirvana is cows, bikes and
a chocolate shop
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CROATIA

We were told this island
wasn't worth visiting. Right.
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TIKEHAU

It's the tiniest Tahiti
(with bungalows!)
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THE
CLOSER YOU LOOK
AT WHAT WE INCLUDE FOR FAMILIES
THE
BETTER WE LOOK





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The smell of jerk chicken mixes with humming music as a parade of dancers and musicians make their way down West Bay Road. As vibrant as the crystal blue views that surround them, the performers are costumed in flowing colours, waving flags, rallying crowds to sing and dance along. This is Batabano, the annual carnival of the Cayman Islands. Named for the tracks that turtles make along the sand to nest, Batabano combines all things characteristic to Caymanian culture: vibrant food, magnetic entertainment, and a welcome that radiates from every person you meet. Join the festivities, **May 3 -10, 2015**.

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If you can't make it for carnival, plenty of other cultural experiences await among these shores. Comprised of

three islands, the destination is best known for Grand Cayman, the largest of its counterparts. However, the smaller Sister Islands, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman, promise big beauty. On Cayman Brac, active endeavors abound, from birdwatching to hiking atop

the island's namesake, a 140 ft. limestone bluff. Travellers to Little Cayman will enjoy private beaches complemented by the deepest sense of serenity.

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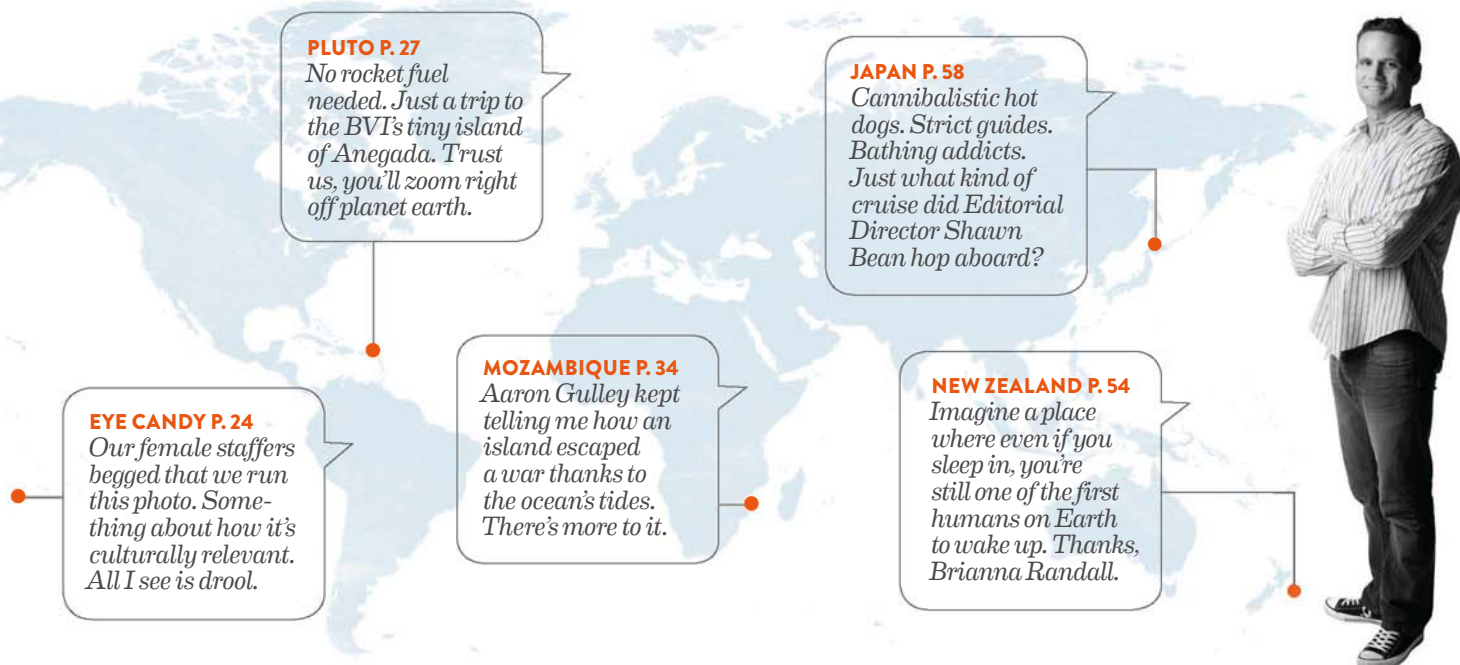
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No rocket fuel needed. Just a trip to the BVI's tiny island of Anegada. Trust us, you'll zoom right off planet earth.

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EDDY PATRICELLI

He's still Islands' brand director, and he still struggles with this photo. Here he presents the mag's real heroes.



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ON THE COVER To answer your question: Yes, that's a Croatian island (see page 48). Photo by Bertrand Gardel.

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ISLANDS NOW

DISPATCHES

ANTIGUA I've given up on a tan. Puddles continue to form, and the locals have called in "sick" to work due to the unusual weather. The wet day brings an already slow island pace to a standstill, but it dampens the beach's appeal only a little — and that's why I'm still hanging out on the sand at Carlisle Bay. I haven't soaked up any sun but I am soaked. I've found the **cure for warm Caribbean rain**: a swimsuit, a cabana and a stubborn attitude. Who needs the sun when I have an ocean-size rain room all to myself? — *Digital editor Cami Webb*

GALAPAGOS Apparently I've won a look-alike contest with a whiskered sea-lion mama (not shaving for six weeks can do that) because a **baby sea lion is sleeping on my foot**. Options run through my mind: Do I gently nudge the baby away with my toe? Do I give the little doe-eyed fella a back scratch? I know I'm not supposed to touch the wildlife, but what are the rules for them touching me? The Galapagos may be one of the most tightly controlled regions in the world for human-to-fauna interaction, but it seems nobody forwarded the memo to the animals. I shift gently. The baby sea lion looks up at me and coos happily. I think I'm going to be here a while. — *Photographer Jon Whittle*



BRING BACK

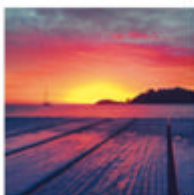
Ancient Hawaiians spent their lives in the sun and salt water. Their remedy for abused skin? Kukui-nut oil. It's so potent they used it to waterproof canoes. The oil is now found in skin lotions: Island Essence is made on Maui and is my way of bringing the island home. — *Carrie Dow*



INSTAGRAM
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#galapagosgreetings
Land iguanas say hello around every turn.



#antiguasunset
The view from my yoga mat. Namaste.



#secretsnorkel
Find this natural pool in northeast Aruba.



#trunkbayallday
No doubt it will always top best-beaches lists.



WARMING YOU UP

In the wake of the announcement that the U.S. will restore relations with Cuba, here are your thoughts on travel and tourism.

► **Rafael Torres**: Won't touch it until the regime leaves and the people are free. Money spent there will go to support a communist regime. Cubans won't see much or any of it.

► **Dave George**: It's time to forget the past. South Florida will benefit immensely, as Cuba's infrastructure needs to be modernized. This is a win-win.

► **Joanne Masopust**: It's interesting to me that people have an issue with this but seem OK with our diplomatic relations with Russia and China, travel to both repressive countries, and buy mass quantities of products made in China via Walmart.

► **Magfret Juan Evans**: This won't help the people. No freedom of speech, no freedom to vote in open elections.

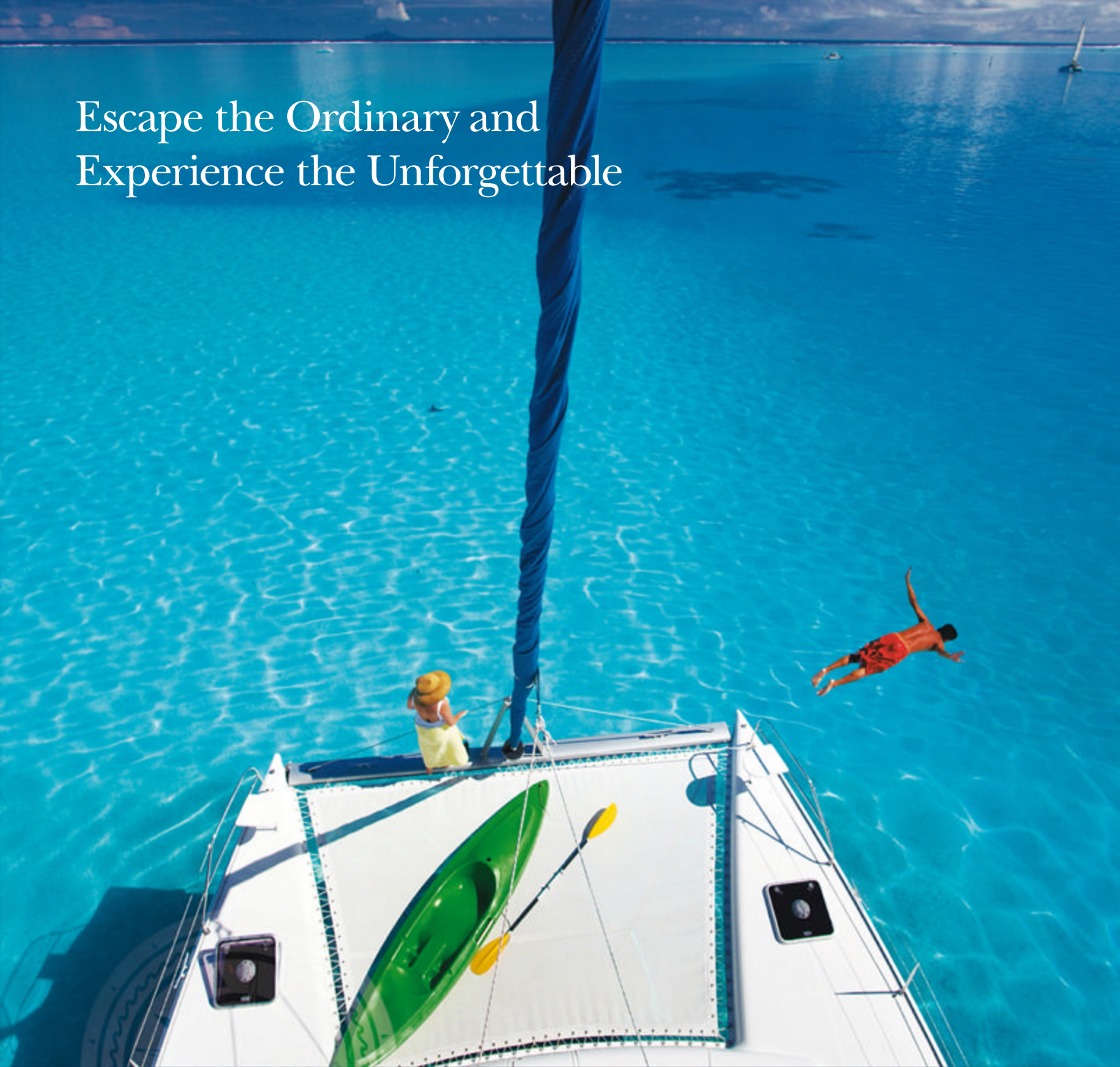
► **Jennifer Pynn Scott**: I go to Cuba almost every year. Beautiful country, nice people.

📷 **SEE OUR PHOTO ESSAY ON CUBA:**
[islands.com/cuba](#)

GIVE BACK

200

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Apo Island, Philippines

PHOTO BY TOMMY SCHULTZ

MODEL PARADISE

IF YOU'RE CURIOUS

Apo Island in the Philippines is tiny, just .04 square mile, but among snorkelers and divers it's like Everest. Sea turtles, thresher sharks, mantas — they play here, in part thanks to Apo's strong culture of conservation. The island's fishermen set up a marine sanctuary over 30 years ago.

650 SPECIES OF FISH; 400 TYPES OF CORAL

IF YOU'RE SERIOUS

Apo has just two lodges. Pictured is Apo Island Beach Resort. The other, Liberty's Lodge, located inland, offers ops to connect with the island's 900 locals, most of whom fish. Brace for limited Internet (and electricity). Savor a glimpse of life as it has existed for centuries. *apoislandresort.com; apoisland.com*

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TOMMY SCHULTZ



GET
HERE



WHERE WE'D GO ...

NOW

BIG ISLAND March is Hawaii's high season. So what are we thinking? Lower rates, room to roam and beer. The island of Hawai'i is cheaper than most of its Hawaiian siblings, has more landmass than all of them put together, and has the Kona Brewers Festival March 14. It's on our radar thanks to a "Sad Hour" ad worth the YouTube search. **ALSO CONSIDER** Dublin, Ireland. Celebrate St. Paddy's Day at the source with a warm Guinness.



JUNE

CAYMAN

There's no better month to save on resorts, miss the crowds, and enjoy the island's snorkeling and diving. But the real kicker is \$100,000 up for grabs June 15. The Flower Sea Swim is a prize giveaway disguised as a come-all swim event. **ALSO CONSIDER** Fiji. Shoulder-season deals mix with great weather.

SEPTEMBER

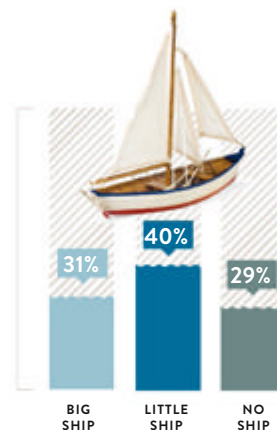
SARDINIA

On the ancient farming calendar, September marked the start of the new year. Festivals are on tap, though you won't see many tourists and you won't miss them. The island is known for its friendly locals and sees 300 days of sun a year. **ALSO CONSIDER** Curaçao. Dodge hurricanes; seize discounts.



WOULD YOU RATHER ...

CRUISE ON A
BIG SHIP, LITTLE SHIP
OR NO SHIP?



- ▶ "Any ship that can take me away from Missouri!"
— Deborah Boody-Hirschak
- ▶ "Been on 16 cruises, big and small. Prefer midsize."
— KA Burke-Ulrich
- ▶ "Motorcycle." — Mike Jones



INSIDE TRACKS

As we go to press, *Wild* is a box-office hit. But in some ways that epic trek falls short of Robyn Davidson's. In 1977, at age 26, she set out to cross Australia's outback with four camels and a dog. To this day, the question "Why?" remains unanswered. It's one reason her nine-month, 1,700-mile walkabout is so compelling, and why it led to a best-selling book, and recently, a motion picture. *Inside Tracks* chronicles Robyn's original journey through Rick Smolan's bold photographs. He joined Robyn along her trek. And for any traveler, his story has as many hooks as hers. insidetracksbook.com — Eddy Patricelli



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PUNTA CANA TELL-ALL

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SANCTUARY REVEALED

\$150 per person per night

Only here: Private-island feel • **Rooms:** 176; 21 different types • **Restaurants:** 5 **Bars:** 6 • **Pools:** 5; 1 adults-only • **Internet:** Free in lobby; \$12 a day elsewhere sanctuarycapcana.com

CATEGORY 1

BEST FOR COUPLES

#1 Sanctuary Cap Cana This just doesn't fit with what I've heard about all-inclusives. For starters, there's a castle (La Fortaleza) stretching out over the ocean. A few steps away are island-style bungalows, and in the middle of the resort, Spanish colonial-style buildings harbor intimate hideouts.

My fiancé and I lounge at the almost-hidden rooftop bar, just three steps from the infinity pool that offers views of the sea through the castle's stone turrets. Back in

our suite (now a honeymoon contender), it only gets better. We have three private plunge pools inside our quarters. *Three.* One is as big as my dining room. Just outside, a path along the castle moat leads to powder-white sand at Juanillo Beach, where my own Cinderella story ends with a very surprising scene: a beach in Punta Cana where we can snuggle in solitude.

RUNNERS-UP #2 Royal Service *Paradisus Palma Real* (personal butler included) **#3 Excellence** (friendliest staff, peaceful) — *Cami Webb*

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1 TRIP FOR TWO TO WAIKIKI

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2 LITTLE PALM ISLAND

Three-night stay in an Island Romance suite at Little Palm Island, the most secluded retreat in the Florida Keys. The stay includes a waterfront breakfast each morning. It's so far from the crowds that presidents and celebrities escape here. littlepalmisland.com

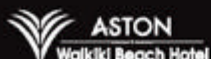
3 VILLA STAY ON ANTIGUA

A four-night all-inclusive stay at St. James's Club Resort & Villas on the tropical island of Antigua. Located on a remote peninsula in the Caribbean Sea, the resort offers guests two amazing private beaches and six swimming pools. stjamesclubantigua.com

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PREMIER PARTNERS



CATEGORY 2

BEST FOR FAMILIES

#1 Reserve at Paradisus Punta Cana Of the five family resorts I visit, most prioritize kids at the expense of adults. At the Reserve, I find balance. The family concierge service comes with an upcharge of \$50 a night and offers a personal butler/nanny for the whole stay. And space? Put it this way: When my husband-to-be and I spread out our two weeks' worth of luggage, our suite felt like it needed something: more people.

When we came back to our room after dinner, yes, the bed was turned down, but next to it were nuances that helped make this my top family pick: milk, cookies and a pint-size bathrobe (made me wish I were 10 again). But despite all the youngster-approved goodies, I never felt like I was in a day care. With in-pool massage loungers and craft cocktails, the Reserve is grown up enough for the grown-ups. And oddly quiet — the kids-only pool keeps screams and splashes at bay. Forget Wally World; *this* is a family vacation. **RUNNERS-UP**

#2 Family Club Barcelo Bavaro (kids-only bar) **#3 Club Med** (friendliest guests) — CW

RESERVE REVEALED

\$207 per person per night

Only here: Reserved family poolside palapas, in-room game consoles • **Rooms:** 132

Restaurants: 12 • **Bars:** 9

Pools: 2 at the Reserve; 1 kids-only; access to 4 pools at Paradisus Punta Cana • **Distance from beach:** 10-minute walk (golf carts run every 20 minutes) • **Wi-Fi:** Included

paradisus-puntacana.com



WHY PUNTA CANA?

Big beaches. Cheap rooms. Quick flights. At a glance, Punta Cana sounds like a lot of getaways. Here's why this Dominican Republic province is now the fastest-growing region in the Caribbean.

Nonstop Punta Cana

- Nonstop flights offered from 28+ countries and 96 cities worldwide
- New terminal opened in November that allows the airport to serve 6,500 more passengers daily
- Punta Cana airport is the second busiest in the Caribbean, with 350 flights arriving per week
- 15 minutes from airport to main resort area of Punta Cana

All-Inclusive Punta Cana

- 50 all-inclusives to choose from
- 40 miles of white-sand beach
- 28,000 hotel rooms to choose from
- 100,000 people live in Punta Cana, but 3 million visit annually, almost all for the choice of all-inclusives
- 3,000 people work at the Hard Rock
- 70% of Caribbean travelers visit the DR.





CATEGORY 3

BEST FOOD & DRINK

#1 *Barcelo Bavaro Palace Deluxe* After shuffling through buffet lines three times a day at other resorts, I find redemption. At check-in, I'm greeted with a spread of bite-size delicacies, including my favorite, fresh ceviche, as the concierge starts listing options for dinner. Japanese. French. Mexican. He tells me only two of the 11 restaurants are buffets.

The rest involve a menu (no heated plate stacks), a waiter (hello, service!), and some even have a dress code (date night, done). Barefoot dining at poolside is an option too, and a Dominican spread at lunch means I can nosh on local faves like sancocho without leaving the resort. It was a challenge to save room after dinner for chocolate ganache cake topped with mango and crunchy hazelnuts, so it's a good thing I'm competitive.

RUNNERS-UP **#2** *The Level at Melia Caribe Tropical* (cooking stations specializing in meat and fish, modern Miami vibe) **#3** *Excellence* (all-you-can-eat lobster) — *CW*

BARCELO BAVARO REVEALED

\$110 per person per night

Only here: Small-city vibe, shopping mall • **Rooms:** 1,402

Restaurants: 11 • **Bars:** 13; sports bar is 24 hours • **Wine cellars:** 3 • **Pools:** 4 • **Water parks:** 2 • **Distance from airport:** 15 minutes • **Wi-Fi & room service:** Included only for Club Premium members
barcelo.com

PUNTA CANA AT HOME

Make these resort favorites.



PIÑA BAVARO

Barcelo Bavaro

4 oz. pineapple juice
2 oz. coconut cream
1½ bananas
1½ oz. rum

Blend and serve in a pineapple, coconut or cocktail glass.



PARADISUS

Paradisus Resorts

½ mango
3 large strawberries
juice of ½ lime
2 tbsp. sugar
1 oz. white rum
glass of crushed ice

Blend until smooth and frothy. Garnish with strawberry or mango.

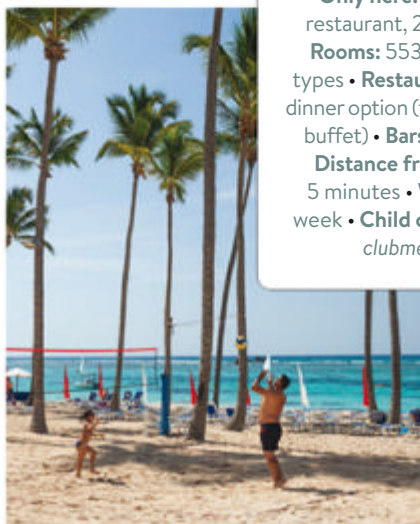


BLUE LEVEL

The Level at Melia Caribe Tropical

1 oz. pineapple juice
1 oz. Blue Curaçao
2 oz. champagne

Shake Blue Curaçao and pineapple juice with ice. Add champagne and serve with your fruit garnish of choice.



CLUB MED REVEALED

\$162 per person per night

Only here: Overwater restaurant, 25+ activities
Rooms: 553; 3 different types • **Restaurants:** 3; just 1 dinner option (themed nightly buffet) • **Bars:** 3 • **Pools:** 3

Distance from airport: 5 minutes • **Wi-Fi:** \$50 a week • **Child care:** Included
clubmed.com

CATEGORY 4

BEST AMENITIES & ACTIVITIES

#1 Club Med Punta Cana The first thing on my schedule (before breakfast even) is a trapeze lesson. I've never fantasized about being in Cirque du Soleil, but then again I've never had a chance to learn from its aerial artists. As I climb the ladder, I'm a bit shaky. And as I reach for the swinging bar. And as I land below in a real circus net after my first flip. But afterward? I'm ready for round two. This time I'll even point my toes. Club Med prides itself on sending travelers home with more than just a tan.

The rest of the day is about getting back into that familiar vacation rhythm of doing nothing, so I order a rum punch before indulging in *arancini* (rice balls) at Hispaniola, built right over the water, and hit the sheets early for tomorrow's archery lesson and volleyball game. **RUNNERS-UP** **#2 Grand Palladium** (energetic crowd, lots of live music) **#3 Royal Service Paradisus Palma Real** (butler on speed dial, comfiest beds) — CW



WHAT WE LEARNED

"The most high-end properties can often be priced at the same rate as those on the low end of the scale. After staying in 20 resorts, this is what surprised me most." — JON WHITTLE

"I was drawn to the sections of the buffet marked 'gourmet,' but it turns out sometimes that was just a label."
— BRONWYN KNIGHT

"Not everything in an all-inclusive is included, even if it's in your room. Wi-Fi and even the bottle of champagne displayed on the dresser can carry an extra charge." — ZACH STOVALL

"Hide your resort wristband when doing local shopping. Barter prices go up depending on which resort you're staying in." — CAMI WEBB

CATEGORY 5

BEST STANDARD ROOM

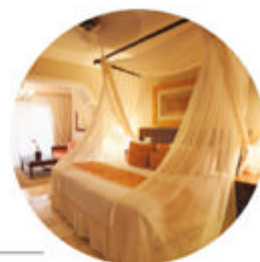
#1 Royal Service Paradisus Palma Real The price tag says "affordable all-inclusive," but my digs for the week say "luxury resort." Other area properties that claim luxury charge twice as much per night for half as nice a room. Upon arrival, I was whisked from the open-air entrance to the cool (read: air-conditioned) personal check-in for Royal Service guests and greeted with a mimosa and a cellphone to reach my butler at any time. Vacation mode activated. Purse put away for the week.

So what now? I could spend all day at the private beach soaking up rays, but after flopping onto my pillow-top canopy bed, preened to my tastes thanks to a menu of pillows and aromas, I had a hard time leaving the room. A spa shower and a bathtub big enough to double as a plunge pool made it even harder. And the view from my terrace? That's it — I'm staying in tonight, and maybe tomorrow night too.

RUNNERS-UP

#2 Excellence (adult spring break)

#3 Hard Rock (personal sleep soundtrack, rock-star status) — CW



PARADISUS REVEALED

\$400 per person per night

Only here: Overwater-bungalow spa, butler-drawn baths (with wine)

Rooms: 204 • **Restaurants:** 12

Bars: 9 • **Pools:** 1 adults-only; use of 4 other pools at Paradisus Punta Cana

Distance from airport: 30 minutes

Wi-Fi: Included • paradisus.com

Try Not Having Fun ...

SURFING WAIKIKI

BY MATTHEW MILLER

WHERE: HAWAII'S BUSIEST BEACH
CONFESSION: I'D NEVER GO ALONE

A day on the world's most famous beach? Not my first choice when visiting Oahu. "Famous" might as well be Hawaiian for crowded. The hotels lining Waikiki are so dense you can't see the beach from Kalakaua Avenue. And the half-naked mass of humanity covering the sand means I have to dance a jig to reach the water for my surfing lesson. It's my first time surfing, ever — at the birthplace of surfing itself. Which makes it very awkward (another Hawaiian word for "embarrassing") during dry-land practice, pretending to surf in front of about a thousand Hawaii-born surfers. I teeter on the board even though we're 20 feet away from the water.

"Relax," says my coach, Mike, noticing my nerves. "You're in Waikiki."



When we waded out to the chest-high waves, something changes. The 12-foot board is more stable than it was on land. Mike times an incoming breaker — "Paddle, paddle, paddle!" — and pushes the board. I stand up. Two seconds, three seconds. I'm surfing! No, I'm falling. But I was surfing. And that's all I came to do.



DO come surf in summer, when the swell is mellow and long-breaking. Even I could do it, explaining why this is surfing's birthplace.



DON'T let the development fool you. The beach, the waves, Diamond Head's iconic profile — Waikiki is still a natural wonder.

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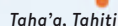
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in the App Store.



LIFE HERE



CEDRIC ANGELES/INTERSECTION PHOTOS



Taha'a, Tahiti

PHOTO BY CEDRIC ANGELES

TAHITIAN TREADMILL

IF YOU'RE CURIOUS

Roe Hikutini Heiarii is an eight-time winner of Tahiti's Hawaiki Nui Va'a paddling race. Roe (pronounced "Ray") trains year-round from his home on Taha'a, and paddles as many as 20 miles between islands. In Tahiti, this isn't lunacy. It's life.

1,488 ROWERS
RACE 79 MILES
IN 3 DAYS

IF YOU'RE SERIOUS

The Hawaiki Nui Va'a is Tahiti's Super Bowl. Schools and businesses close. Island rivalries culminate. And the best place to witness it is Bora Bora, where the race finishes, typically in the first week of November. Bora Bora is just a 49-minute flight from Papeete, Tahiti. hawaikinuivaa.pf

TAHITI'S LARGEST
ANNUAL EVENT
INVOLVES
MUSCULAR MEN,
SLEEK CANOES
AND LOTS OF
DETERMINATION.

SMOKE SCREENED

BY ROBERT STEPHENS



WHERE: PUERTO RICO
THE FIND: SUNDAY BARBECUE

The outskirts of San Juan have gone up in smoke. You can see it from a mile away. You can smell it too — a potpourri of sweet, savory, greasy smoke. Just in time for lunch, if I dare wade into the fire.

“It’s safe,” a lady named Anastasia tells me on the steps of a church. “It isn’t the healthiest food, but if you want to know what we do on Sundays, that’s the place.”

So I drive to the heat emanating from the area of Piñones, where bathtub-size barbecues line the shoulders of Route 187 for as far as I can see. Fires are built with any available wood, even if it has nails in it. Pit masters dance to loud music and popping canola oil. Everything moves with positive energy, except traffic. I park near an oyster cart and continue on foot.

All around me people carry plates drooping under the weight of bacalaitos, alcapurrias and Puerto Rican tacos. Picking one food item from just the right vendor is impossible. Eenie meenie.

At a coconut-water stand I exchange a cash tip for a local tip. “If I were your

cousin from the U.S.,” I say to the vendor, “where would you tell me to eat?”

“Lucy’s,” he says. “She makes everything ‘in the moment’ [fresh].”

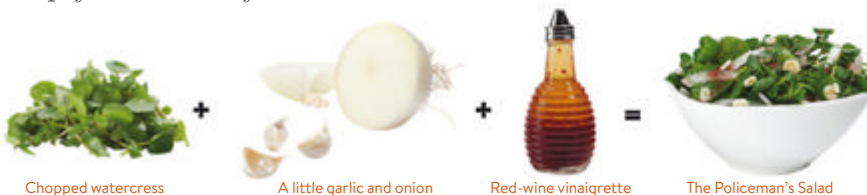
“Which *kiosko* is hers?” I ask.

He points into the sea of smoke. The directions would be useless if he didn’t add this: “She doesn’t always smile.”

My search takes me between kids carrying whiffle ball bats and dogs eating leftovers. Everyone is so happy. Everyone except the lady up on the left. Her face is as serious as her cast-iron pot.

“Would you happen to be Lucy?” I ask.

RECIPE 1-2-3 “Do you know how to use that?” the burly police officer asks as I walk out of a market in Roseau, Dominica. He’s pointing to the peppery watercress protruding from my bag. His manner suggests the wrong answer might get me a stiff fine. “I stir-fry it, sir.” No, he says sternly, and gives me the recipe for what I shall forever call Policeman’s Salad. — Ann Vanderhoof



Chopped watercress

A little garlic and onion

Red-wine vinaigrette

The Policeman's Salad



She doesn’t look up. “Your order?”

That must be a yes. But I have no idea what to order. A lady next to me is holding some sort of deep-fried pie. Under pressure I blurt, “One of those, please.”

“A pionono,” Lucy says, and starts her work a few steps from the slowly moving cars. I see the pie crust isn’t really pie crust — it’s sweet plantain, used as a wrap. That isn’t spiced apple either — it’s spiced beef. Another deceptive shell is coming off: Lucy’s. “My mother taught me never to take shortcuts and to love cooking for people.” No emotion necessary.

Just as Lucy starts to hand over the pionono ... she pulls it back. I look at her with the eyes of a teased puppy. She points to a burnt spot, no bigger or browner than a penny.

“Let me make another,” she says.

“No, no,” I say, biting into the sweet meat to end any debate. “Actually, yes. Make another one, please.”

Lucy is a little defeated.

“I’ll eat both,” I say. And Lucy lets loose a smile that can be seen a mile away.

PUERTO RICO FOOD GUIDE: islands.com

SPACE PROJECT

BY CARRIE DOW

"Would you like to see my treehouse?" Richard Bassett asks. A transplant from Traverse City, Michigan, Richard has spent winters in Loblolly Bay on Anegada (BVI) since 2000. The treehouse is not for kids. It's Richard's home. I follow him to a wooden sign with "Welcome to Pluto" burned into it. Richard offers me the futon while he sits on the camp chair. Above us is a branch duct-taped with foam.

Q: What's the foam all about?

A: (Laughs) I've hit my head a few times.

Q: So show me your place.

A: That's my bedroom (points to a tent), my living room (motions to where I'm sitting) and my kitchen (points to a crate holding a propane hot plate).

Q: How did you wind up here?

A: I know the owner of the Big Bamboo

resort. He lets me stay here for doing handy work. I rake the beach every morning. It's where I get my driftwood.

Q: What do you do with the driftwood?

A: I make the signs. For 20 bucks I can make one for you, or I'll show you how to make your own for \$50.

Q: That's how you make a living?

A: No, I'm a musician and juggler on the festival circuit — Michigan, Wisconsin, California. When I've made enough money for a plane ticket, I come back here.

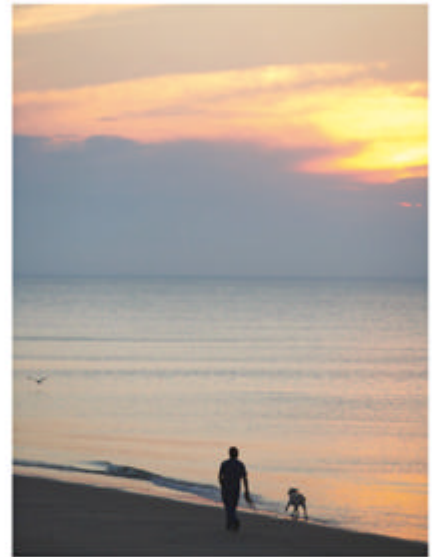
Q: What's there to do around here?

A: We're doing it. Or we can ride bikes.

Q: Why do you call this place Pluto?

A: Because all of the resort's cottages are named after planets, but Pluto got left out. Kinda fits my place though.

MEET MORE EXPATS: islands.com/bitlo



"I like mornings on the beach, but it gets hot during the day. My treehouse is my refuge because it's 10 degrees cooler here than it is on the beach."

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BEQA

DAVUI

Royal Davui
Island Resort

*map not to scale

FIJIAN DREAMER

OWNING A PRIVATE ISLAND RESORT ON FIJI IS THE ULTIMATE FAIRY TALE ... RIGHT?



GRAHAME
SOUTHWICK

AGE
70

OCCUPATION
Owner, Royal Davui
Island Resort, Fiji
royaldavuiifiji.com

FORMER LIFE
Fisherman

Building the Royal Davui was a moment of madness. I'd been sneaking onto the island since I was a kid, but I didn't know anything about it till I met the island's chief and he asked me if I would build a resort. I said yeah, sure.

People think we make a lot of money. About 30 percent of the room rate goes to taxes. And the cost of running an island resort is twice as much as a resort on the mainland.

We get some interesting guests. A group from Ukraine arrived with a suitcase filled with \$50,000 U.S. cash to pay their bills. We sent the notes to a bank and they said they were good but we probably shouldn't ask the guys what they did for a living.

Guests leave all sorts of things behind. Credit cards. Jewelry. And then there were the honeymooners who forgot their Steely Dan. We had to slip it into their luggage before they got on the boat.

I hear lots of island stories.

They say about 500 years ago that fishermen on Beqa, the island next to us, caught an eel. In exchange for his life, the eel gave them the ability to walk on fire. OK, it's a bunch of bull, but it's true that Beqa's men are the only firewalkers in Fiji. It's something to see.

I've swum with sharks since I was 6. Our isle is in a lagoon, and its sharks may check in on snorkelers. They're 3 to 4 feet long and harmless, but they still freak people out.

There are characters living on Fiji. Many of them are descendants of the rascals who landed on these shores in the 1890s — whalers, booze runners, slave traders. We also had our share of pirates. There are all sorts of stories about buried gold and such around Fiji. People are still looking for it. And then there were the cannibals — but don't get me started on that. — as told to David Lansing

WHAT I'D DO HERE

PRIVATE PICNIC: There's a sand spit near Davui. Get dropped off with champagne and a lunch and do whatever you want.

WHITewater RAFT: The Upper Navua Gorge is the Grand Canyon of Fiji.

SHARK DIVE: Hang out with 40 or 50 bull and tiger sharks in Pacific Harbor.

SAMPLE FISH: I can pick from 20 or 30 fish species to eat, but I always take mahimahi home.

“



It's strange what people expect on a small island. We've had guests ask us to get rid of the island's geckos.

”



CHANGING FIJI

“My favorite things about Fiji are fading.

When I grew up here, we were like the Lost Boys. We swam, we fished, we went on adventures.

It's sad that most Fijian kids these days don't know how to catch a fish or tie a knot.” — Grahame Southwick

MAP: OLIVER WINWARD; LIZARD: ISTOCK

EXPLORE

THE HAWAIIAN ISLANDS

by Catherine Toth Fox

BROWSE INSTAGRAM or scroll through a travel blog about Hawai‘i and you’ll see the same images: palm trees swaying against a dazzling sunset, the breathtaking view of the Pacific Ocean from the summit of a ridge trail, the perfectly sun-kissed sandy beach.

And while all those snapshots of the islands are part of any vacation pictorial, Hawai‘i has more depth, more vibrancy, more charisma than what you see online or in travel guides. There’s a native culture that’s thriving, a history that’s ever-present, and a way of life that’s constantly evolving. Here are different ways to explore Hawai‘i that will undoubtedly give you a new perspective on island life.

O‘AHU

Hidden within a residential neighborhood in He‘eia on O‘ahu’s windward coast is a historic Hawaiian fishpond, a vibrant symbol of cultural stewardship and sustainability.

Here, beneath the majestic Ko‘olau Mountains, volunteers have been working with Paepae o He‘eia (paepaeoheiea.org), a private nonprofit that manages and cares for this fishpond, to rebuild the wall, which measures about 1.3 miles long. It stretches out into Kāne‘ohe Bay and forms a complete circle around the pond. This *kuapā*, or wall of the fishpond, encloses 88 acres of brackish water perfect for cultivating *limu* (seaweed) used to raise herbivorous and omnivorous fish like ‘ama‘ama and awa.

There’s just one section of the fishpond wall that’s not complete, a 20-foot-wide gap that needs to be filled with rock and coral stacked in the traditional Hawaiian way (meaning, without mortar). The nonprofit is in the midst of raising the \$100,000 it needs for materials and labor to close up the hole. Once that’s done, the restored wall will connect the two open ends, making the fishpond operational and productive again, like it was 800 years ago.

“It empowers the Hawaiians to practice in a modern-day setting, being able to restore something that our *kūpuna* built 800 years ago and provide opportunities for others to do the same,” says executive director Hi‘ilei Kawelo.

“There are less than a dozen useable fishponds left on O‘ahu, and this is an important cultural tradition that we have the opportunity to preserve and pass onto our children.”

Loko ‘ia, or Hawaiian fishponds, have been around for hundreds of years, with an estimated 350 in operation at the time of Capt. James Cook’s arrival in the islands in 1778. While other cultures had similar techniques of trapping adult fish in shallow tidal areas, the six styles of Hawaiian fishponds, including the large walled ones like He‘eia, are found nowhere else in the world.

Today, most of these fishponds are gone or in major disrepair. Only a few, like this one, are being actively restored. And it’s taken hundreds of volunteer hands, usually on Saturday community workdays open to the public, to save these unique culture treasures.

“As a community, we need to preserve and protect these places of traditional agriculture and aquaculture because of their application and use today,” Kawelo says.



1 Rebuilding the rock wall in the He‘eia Fishpond (OAHU). Photo credit: Sean Marrs 2,3 More He‘eia Fishpond (OAHU). Photo credit: Catherine Toth Fox



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Another image of Pololu Valley from the beach
(Hawai'i Island). Photo credit: Catherine Toth Fox

HAWAI'I ISLAND

Finding Pololū Valley isn't hard.

There's the easy way: Go north on Queen Ka'ahumanu Highway, past the airport and Kekaha Kai State Park and beyond the big resorts in Waikoloa. Then, at the T-junction just past Hāpuna Golf Course, veer left on Highway 270 and follow this past Kawaihae Harbor and into old Kohala town. Keep going, past a gas station that sells killer stuffed *aburage* (tofu pouches) and Spam musubis, past Holy's Bakery and its famous frozen apple pies, past the North Kohala Civic Center and the original King Kamehameha I statue, past a few abandoned trucks on the side of a bend, a Rottweiler that seems to always be there and a banana patch, over five bridges and beyond a roadside fruit stand selling tangerines and lemons. Once you get to a small wind turbine on the left-hand side of the road, you're nearly there. Look for cars parked on the side of the road and a sign that reads, "Pololū Valley Lookout."

Or there's the super-easy way: Get on Highway 270 and drive until the road ends, at mile marker 28.

Really, you can't miss it. And you wouldn't want to, either.

Getting down to the black-sand beach from the lookout along the trail — commonly referred to as 'Āwini Trail — takes about 20 minutes. And that's if you're stopping to snap photos of the sweeping views of the churning Pacific Ocean, peeks of picturesque Pololū Valley or any number of *lauhala* trees, *naupaka* shrubs or *wikelaiki* (Christmas berry) trees that grow along the trail.

Backed by sand dunes and rows of ironwood trees lies Pololū Beach, a wide expanse of black sand rimmed with harsh lava rock and sheer green cliffs. The shoreline is lined with volcanic rocks made round and smooth by the powerful tides.

Because of its remote location, the beach here never gets too crowded, with about two dozen people at most, lounging on the rocky shoreline or snapping photos of the emerald-green cliffs looming overhead.

At one time, long before resorts dotted along the Kona coastline and observatories sprouted atop Mauna Kea, this valley was renowned for taro. In fact, it was known for particular kind of taro — *kalo Pololū* — with crimson-red stems great for making squid *lū'au*. None of that remains now, as the valley fell into disuse in the 20th century. Now people flock here to surf, camp and visit the North Kohala ditch as part of eco-tours.

There aren't many people who venture down to Pololū Valley and its beach, one of the most inaccessible shorelines on the Big Island. Sure, the hike is short, but it's not easy to lug coolers and



Views from 'Āwini Trail at Pololu Valley
(Hawai'i Island). Photo credit: Catherine Toth Fox



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beach chairs down the winding trail to the beach. And though it's easy to find — the end of Highway 270 — it's a haul from the nearest resort and at least 25 miles from the closest Starbucks.

But maybe that's the allure.

MAUI

Waihe'e Valley on Maui is likely best known for its hiking trail, a 5-mile loop through a lush rainforest along the valley's ridge that crosses two swinging bridges and ends at a 15-foot swimming hole. But this valley is steeped in history too. And that's what the Maui Hawaiian Village (mauihawaiianvillage.com) hopes to share with visitors.

The 10-acre village is located on a 25-acre parcel of land that stretches down this misty and verdant valley in West Maui toward the ocean. Up until two years ago, this area was thick with invasive trees, primarily java plum (*Syzygium cumini*). But co-owner Josh Chavez and a few friends cleared about 6 acres, chipped and mulched the trees, and started to build a traditional Hawaiian village, complete with *lo'i kalo* (irrigated terraces for taro) and open-air *hale* with roofs thatched with dried palm leaves.

The tour starts in Wailuku Town, with a drive through macadamia-nut and sugar plantation fields. When you enter this fertile valley, you'll see why

this area once fed the armies of both Kahekili and Kamehameha as they battled at nearby 'Iao Valley.

There's a lot of history under the canopy here. When Chavez cleared the area, he found ancient taro *lo'i* and platforms for homes. The fresh waters here are still teeming with *o'opu* (goby), *'opae* (shrimp) and three different kinds of freshwater limpets. Native birds such as the *ae'o* (stilt), *'alae ke'oke'o* (coot) and *koloa* (duck) are spotted here. And without even trying, hundreds of papaya, *kukui* (candlenut) and noni trees popped up where the java plum trees once stood.

In order to share the magic of this valley, Chavez built a traditional village and offers tours to visitors where they can participate in hands-on activities such as *kapa*-pounding, rope-lashing and poi-pounding in three thatched-roof *hale* overlooking the *lo'i* and groves of papaya and banana trees.

The tour is highly educational, with longtime West Maui residents sharing their cultural practices with visitors. They don't just show you how to pound *kapa*; they explain the entire process, from stripping the bark of a *wauke* (paper mulberry tree) to dyeing the cloth. There's even an *imu* (traditional underground oven) that visitors can help load with staple foods harvested from the valley.

The goal is to restore the valley to its glory and share the history and culture of the place, and Maui Hawaiian Village is doing just that.



1 This is the trail that leads down to another area where taro is grown. Along the path are papaya trees. 2 One of the three hale (traditional open-air structures) where cultural activities take place.

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KAUA'I

Every Thursday, for as long as people can remember, the community on Kaua'i's north shore gathers in an open-air garage in Waipā, a massive *ahupua'a* (ancient Hawaiian land division) in Hanalei, to prepare hundreds of pounds of poi that's sold to families in the area.

These volunteers, who arrive at 5 a.m., sit on metal folding chairs, hunched over plastic and tin buckets full of chunks of taro harvested from farms around the island. They *ho ili*, or remove the skin, and *vili vili* (wash), the taro. Next, they *kali ai*, or take off, the imperfections, before the chunks are put into an industrial grinder three times to get the right consistency of poi.



1 Volunteers preparing the taro during Poi Day at Waipa (Kaua'i). Photo credit: Catherine Toth Fox
2 Waipa, the ahupua'a (Kaua'i). Photo credit: Catherine Toth Fox

Then it's weighed, bagged and distributed to the community — all by lunchtime.

The valley itself is culturally significant.

This 1,600-acre ahupua'a is one of the few remaining intact and undeveloped land divisions in Hawai'i. Owned by Kamehameha Schools and managed by the Waipā Foundation (waipafoundation.org), a community-based nonprofit that serves as stewards of the land, the land stretches from the summit of the 2,500-foot Mamalahoa through native forests and a 2-acre lo'i with fields of heart-shaped taro, and down meandering streams to the partially restored 7-acre Halulu fishpond teeming with mullet and tilapia and overlooking picturesque Hanalei Bay.

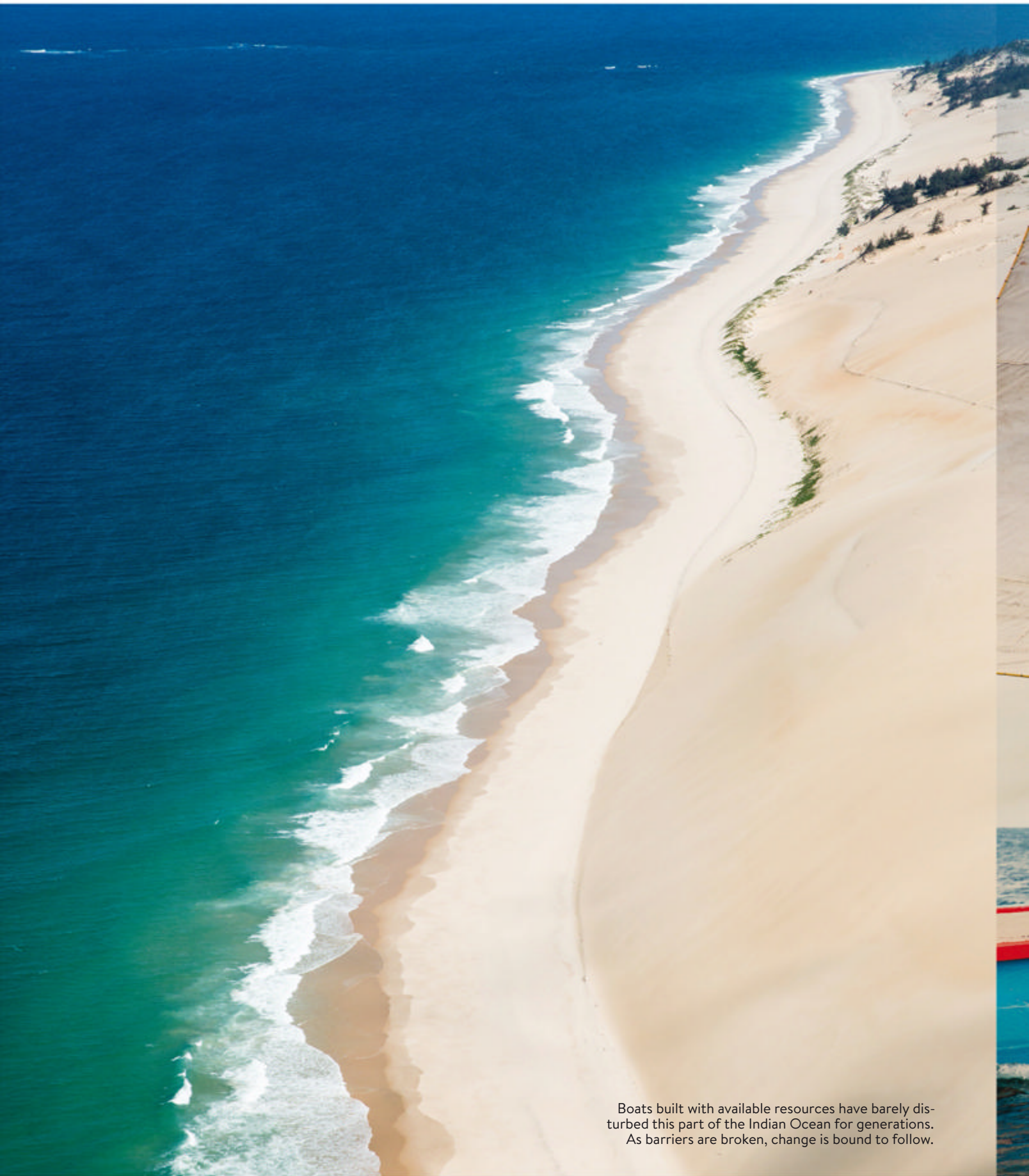
In recent years, Waipā has become invigorated with activity. It hosts a popular weekly farmers market every Tuesday afternoon on its open lawn, with about 35 vendors selling fresh and mostly organic fruits, veggies, flowers and prepared foods. And it runs various cultural programs and educational tours — many of them customizable — that teach Hawaiian values and customs to thousands of kids and families throughout the year.

And then there's Poi Day, where you learn not only about the preparation of this staple in the Hawaiian diet, but can help a community sustain an important resource.*

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Boats built with available resources have barely disturbed this part of the Indian Ocean for generations. As barriers are broken, change is bound to follow.

O N T H E E D G E O F F O R G O T T E N

A 30-YEAR CONFLICT COULD
HAVE WIPED OUT THIS GROUP
OF ISLANDS OFF MOZAMBIQUE.
BUT NATURE SAVED ITSELF,
PROTECTING AN AMAZING
PLACE WHERE FEW HAVE GONE.

STORY BY AARON GULLEY

PHOTOS BY JEN JUDGE

ISLANDS
WE NEVER
KNEW
africa





T H E I S L A N D S M U S T N O T W A N T M E .

In an open-air bar at what feels like the end of the Earth, a man named Track Armor is plying me with fiery piri-piri chicken and chips, the de facto national dish of Mozambique, as a thunderstorm on the Indian Ocean clatters palm fronds overhead like bowling pins. We were supposed to cross over from this coastal town of Vilankulo to Magaruque Island. But then came the rain, and the wind. A boat ride would likely end badly on a sandbar, so Track, the island caretaker who is also reopening the historic Hotel Dona Ana here, insists on putting me up.

“Pity to miss a night on Magaruque,” Track says.

For another 12 hours, the Bazaruto Archipelago

will remain where it’s always been: out of reach.

A thin man with wire spectacles and proper Queen’s English, Track grew up in neighboring Zimbabwe when it was still Rhodesia and survived the country’s infamous Bush War. Now he travels throughout Africa setting up lodges for his boss, John Bredenkamp, a Zimbabwean tycoon. Also at the table is John Mellet, a cinder block of a man who fought in the Special Air Services during the war. He is Magaruque’s handyman.

The fact that shrewd hands like these from old Africa are driving Mozambique’s travel industry speaks to the country’s place as a tourism newcomer.



Mainland Mozambique is no stranger to the rest of the world (right), but the tides have left a unique, if not miraculous, mark on islands like Magaruque (left).



While nearby countries do booming safari business, Mozambique might as well be blacked out on the map. Its islands are even more mysterious. When I heard whispers about the raw beauty of the Bazaruto Archipelago, I had to see firsthand how a place with so much to offer could be such a void.

The answer starts to be revealed at the dinner table. The men tell me how the country was devastated by the three-decades-long war that erupted in the 1960s with its fight for independence from Portugal, and how a subsequent civil war took a million lives, reduced the country to rubble, and turned wildlife to bones and ghosts. The country is still trying to rebound from its own history.

“Mozambique is a country of broken dreams and promises. It’s slow and unpredictable,” Track says.

“On the other hand, there’s so much free space, so much potential.”

And with that the question for me changes: How can a place this isolated shed such a difficult past?

THE SUN IS SEARING LIKE A BROILER NINE HOURS later as we motor 6 miles from Vilankulo out to sea. In the distance, a giant, partially submerged sand dune shimmers like a mirage on a cerulean plain. The speedboat cuts a shallow trough in waters as glassy as a bottle of Bombay gin. From time to time, manta rays drift under our path like passing cloud shadows.

Pedro Naif Cuinhane, the caretaker who’s been working on Magaruque for 26 years, meets me at the water’s edge. Before I can turn to thank the boat captain, he has sped off in a burst of urgency.





IF YOU'RE CURIOUS

The Bazaruto Archipelago was once on the cusp of glory. The rocky islet of Santa Carolina, aka Paradise Island, was the site of a palatial hotel built in the early 1950s. Bob Dylan is said to have written the song "Mozambique" on the hotel's grand piano, which has since been moved to Anantara. The hotel itself was shuttered in 1973 at the outset of the war, and all that remains is a spooky bombed-out shell.

IF YOU'RE SERIOUS

Getting here is neither complicated nor quick. Fly to Johannesburg from major U.S. hubs on South African Airways (saa.com). Then it's a direct flight to Vilankulo, Mozambique, and a memorable ride to one of the islands. Large groups can rent all of Magaruque (magaruqueisland.com). Anantara (bazaruto.anantara.com) offers horseback riding on the dunes and snorkeling too amazing to describe. And Azura Benguerra (azura retreats.com) fronts some of the most incredible beaches imaginable.

Pedro shows me the property, which consists of a large thatch-roofed villa and three smaller bungalows set behind an infinity pool. The island has been open to the public for barely a year.

"Until then," Pedro says, "it was Mr. Bredenkamp's personal family getaway."

After getting settled, I return to the pool patio with a glass of rosé and almost drop it at what I see: The ocean, the one I just crossed to get here, has vanished. The tide has rushed out, leaving a patchwork of turquoise wading pools and snowy dunes to the horizon.

"It's possible to walk back to Vilankulo at low tide," Pedro says. He explains that in 2000 the cyclone Leon-Eline shoved the channel, once 80 yards deep, almost full of sand. It's problematic for boats, which explains my captain's hurry to leave, but it's also one of the most extraordinary views I've ever beheld, like watching an impressionistic painting in progress. The panorama isn't unlike Mozambican tourism in general, devastatingly raw and beautiful but still so new that it's unclear how it will turn out.

There's not much to do on Magaruque besides relax and study the sea. It takes only an hour to walk around the entire island, which, like the channel, is composed of blown-in sand. That makes for broad, sugary beaches the entire way, with thousands of flamingos poised like a field of pink lollipops. When I pass through a tiny fishing village along the way, the people keep their distance, ducking into thatch-roofed huts as I draw near, and I have the feeling they're watching me from the darkened doorwells.

Over dinner, a platter of grilled lobster and fish, I ask Pedro why the villagers seemed so ... unfriendly.

"Not unfriendly," he tells me. "Cautious."

He says that Mozambicans have suffered through a lot in the recent past. "Not many years ago, we could sit on this beach and hear the guns, see the bombs," he says, "but the war never came here."

It's no wonder that the locals might be protective of this place. Had the channel between the mainland filled with sand during the war as it had earlier today, soldiers would likely have walked over at low tide and the islands would have been lost. As it happened, the will of the ocean protected them.

FEW EYES HAVE SEEN THIS. OUT THE WINDOW of a four-seat Cessna en route to the eponymous Bazaruto Island is an aquamarine kaleidoscope. It might as well be a mirage, because the flight to the largest island in the chain lasts only 10 minutes.

I check in at Anantara, the archipelago's biggest resort, with 44 villas tucked into the tangled



New resorts have helped fund schools, medical clinics and, on Benguerra Island (left), a dhow so the people can take their goods to the mainland for bartering.

hedgerow of cashew trees and coconut palms. The resort was acquired recently by the Bangkok-based luxury hotel group Anantara, another sign of momentum in the region. On this day, vacationing Europeans and expatriates from Mozambique's capital, Maputo, fill nearly every seafront cabana.

At dawn I meet Alberto Chionisse Massame and Alberto Henrique Zivane at the dock, where they've prepped a boat for a day of marlin fishing. Neither speaks much English, so their redundant names are helpful. We motor around the north side of the island and into the rough Mozambique Channel, where 5-foot swells kick the boat around like flotsam.

Once the outriggers are baited and strung, something strikes and I spend half an hour playing tug-of-war with what turns out to be a 60-pound bigeye tuna. I'm impressed, but the Albertos just shake their heads — back it goes. Next comes a yellowtail, then another tuna. My hosts keep tossing the fish overboard with no emotion. They only become animated when they hear the radio crackling with word that a guy on another boat is fighting a 600-pound blue marlin.

The heat is rising and I want a swim.

“No,” one of the Albertos says. I take off my shirt to go in anyway, but both guides block me. It’s clear they want to tell me something that language isn’t permitting. I eventually give up and keep fishing.

On my next catch, the fight stops when the line suddenly goes limp. I reel in a tuna that’s sawed almost in half by tooth-mark serrations.

“Shark,” says one Alberto.

“Good thing you didn’t swim,” Conrad Oosthuizen, Anantara’s South African activities manager, tells me later. Bull sharks, the hyenas of the sea, prowl the channel. “I’ve heard of a guy reaching into the water to rinse his hand and losing an arm.”

Tomorrow, I tell Oosthuizen, I’ll be happy to spend the day lounging under one of those beach

palapas and cooling off in the pool. But neither plan will happen. Not here. Not anywhere in the chain.

THE FISHERMEN ARE UNEASY TO SEE ME APPROACH on Benguerra Island. I’d been planning to lounge in my seafront villa when I spied the fishermen in the tidal flats. Wanting to know more about everyday life here, I waded out in warm, waist-deep water to reach the group, all men and boys from a single family.

But as I come closer, they begin moving off. I ask two boys, the only ones who speak English, about the small catch in their boat. After my experience in the Mozambique Channel with the Albertos, these fish don’t look big enough to be used as bait.

“For dinner,” Luis Joao Mandane, 16, tells me. His brother, Phillip Luis Mandane, around 10, pulls a sardine from the net. The boys tell me about their village and the one-room bush school they attend. Others in the group eavesdrop, and before long we’re all standing around the boat yammering, the boys translating and the walls crumbling just a little.

To see the Bazaruto islands with no barriers whatsoever, I take a boat ride with Jayson Bamberger, the dive master at Azura Benguerra Resort. He buzzes me to nearby Pansy Island, a 200-foot-high sand dune that becomes an island when the tide is out. Rose-hued pansies, or sand dollars, for which the place is named, litter the flour-soft beach. At the base of the dune are pottery shards, some of which Azura’s staff estimates to be 800 years old. Every few steps I reach down to touch them because they remind me of doubloons from a lost treasure.

“It’s like this from Tanzania in the north down to South Africa in the south,” Jayson says.

Mozambique’s challenge, I realize, isn’t escaping its checkered past; it’s embracing an unknown future, a future that will include more inquisitive visitors like me. For the traveler, there are obstacles — shifting sandbars, wary locals, laborious travel and a fledgling infrastructure. But get beyond those things and you wind up in an unknown destination like Pansy Island. A place you cannot fake or duplicate.

When it’s time for us to leave, I consider pocketing one of the pansies as a souvenir, but Jayson admonishes me. He reaches down for a sand dollar that’s partially broken and, on picking it up, splits it in half with the nonchalance of snapping his fingers. Promise is as delicate as beauty, it seems. A fine, pink dust filters down from the broken pieces, but before it hits the beach, the wind sweeps up the falling remnants and carries them into the warm Indian Ocean.

 **WATCH 60-SECOND TRIPS:** islands.com/videos

Tourism is so young that no one is certain what it will bring to Bazaruto in the long term. For now the people anchor their livelihood on what they know best: the sea.





EVERY FEW
STEPS I REACH
DOWN TO
TOUCH
TREASURES.





GOING ONE STEP BEYOND

ISLANDS
WE NEVER
KNEW

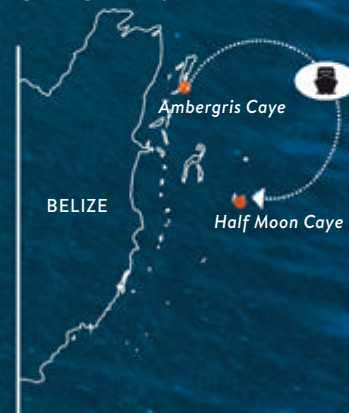
caribbean



BELIZE. PUERTO RICO. THE CAYMAN ISLANDS. THESE MAINSTAYS ARE THE LAUNCHING PADS TO ISLANDS WE JUST DISCOVERED ... ONE SHORT RIDE OFFSHORE.

1. HALF MOON CAVE (*from Ambergris Cay, Belize*)

Divers and snorkelers come by the dozens for the ride from the crowded coast of San Pedro (Ambergris Caye) to the famed Lighthouse Reef. They come specifically to pierce the mysterious depths of the Blue Hole, but the unexpected highlight of the journey is the lunch break on Half Moon Caye, a white-sand crescent in the heart of Lighthouse Atoll. The uninhabited cay is home to more than 2,000 pairs of red-footed boobies nesting in the orange-flowered zircote trees. Come in March to see their preciously ugly chicks. **MAKE THE HOP:** It's a bumpy 45-mile panga trip from San Pedro to the Blue Hole. — *Jad Davenport*



2. MONA ISLAND (from Puerto Rico)

Darwin never visited Mona, but he would've dug it. The uninhabited archipelago lies 41 miles off Puerto Rico's west coast in staggering isolation. Endemic species, including iguanas, orchids and snakes (harmless), thrive. Cave systems lead to pools and pocket beaches, and reveal a sordid history of pirates and Taino Indians.

MAKE THE HOP: Few tour operators offer the three-hour boat ride from Mayagüez. Even fewer offer visits with camping, which requires permits. Our best tip is to look up tourmarinepr.com. — *Eddy Patricelli*



3. LITTLE TOBAGO

From Tobago: 1 mile

It's hard to beat the beauty and brevity of this snorkel-hike trip. Just past the world's largest brain coral is this island speck, where a steep jungle trail ends at a view you share with magnificent frigates.

4. BUCK ISLAND

From St. Croix: 2 miles

The water around Buck Island is what makes the sail out here worthwhile. The coral reefs have been given status as a national monument. Eating lunch on Turtle Beach after snorkeling is pretty special too.

5. BONACCA

From Roatan: 7 miles

Guanaja is the least known of the Bay Islands. This makes it weird to step onto its even lesser-known cay and find 6,000 people living on 100 acres. It's all canals and boats, with no wheels — not even bikes.





6. CAYMAN BRAC (from Grand Cayman)

On the ride from the airport on Cayman Brac to Brac Reef Beach Resort, the taxi driver points out a pizza place, liquor store and grocery mart — the full town tour. Then come fields with cows and a string of candy-colored beachfront homes. “You can’t get lost,” he says. So when a chocolate craving hits, I head to the candy shop on a fat-tired resort bike and zone out while taking in the smell of tangy sea air mingled with field grasses. One car passes, so I figure only one person, maybe two, see me riding like a kid with my feet off the pedals. **MAKE THE HOP:** No ferries link Grand Cayman to Brac. Cayman Airways offers daily 25-minute flights. — Brooke Morton



7. CANOUAN (from St. Vincent)

From the air, St. Vincent’s little sister looks like the secret hideaway of an evil villain. The 6,000-foot runway is suspiciously large for the small, sparsely inhabited island. Mount Royal is tall enough to disguise a secret lair, and the beaches are so pretty that James Bond girls would feel right at home on them. But then I spy the Canouan Resort at Carenage Bay, a playground for high rollers with a Jim Fazio-designed golf course, overwater spa pavilions and high-end villas. The long runway isn’t for nefarious missions or villainous escape pods, but for guests to land their private 737s. Outside the gates, the rest of the island is a step back in time, with goats and chickens roaming freely, and a Caribbean pace that makes St. Vincent look like Manhattan. Nothing evil about it. **MAKE THE HOP:** A 15-minute flight from St. Vincent departs twice daily. — Zach Stovall





Hillsides of grapes, not resorts,
line the island of Vis. But visi-
tors are welcome (see page 48).

3 FACES *of* CROATIA

SHORT BOAT RIDES CONNECT THREE DISTINCTIVE ISLANDS. ONE IS RURAL. ONE IS GLAMOROUS. AND THE OTHER IS, DARE WE SAY ... TROPICAL?

photo essay by ZACH STOVALL

ISLANDS
WE NEVER
KNEW

europe





1

THE ISLAND OF BRAČ, *the middle child*

On Croatia's most popular island, Hvar, there's a running joke that asks, "What's the best thing about Brač?" The answer: "The view from Hvar." So I had to go see it for myself.

This is Brač's boldest beach, the Zlatni Rat. It sticks out into the Adriatic Sea like a sun-bleached version of Gene Simmons' tongue. Like the famous lead singer, Zlatni Rat is a scene stealer, with surprises. The 400-yard white-sand beach? It isn't sand. Those are pebbles that flank Croatia's coasts. The smooth stones kind of massage my toes, and leave nothing between them. And that's a good thing. The lounge chairs pictured in the cove at upper left are for nudes. The rest are for Speedos. It's quite the spectacle as windsurfers whip by just offshore.

Beyond the beach I find more surprises. Five minutes to the east is the photogenic village of Bol (right). Outdoor restaurants line this waterfront, with only a few nods to tourism. So picturesque is this island, I end up spending hours photographing the town of Supetar, which every guidebook I'd read said to skip over.

IF YOU'RE CURIOUS Brač's composition of gleaming white limestone rock was used to construct areas of the White House in Washington, D.C. **IF YOU'RE SERIOUS** It's 13 hours of flying time on US Airways and Croatia Airlines from Charlotte, North Carolina, to Split, Croatia. Ferries service Hvar and Brač in an hour; two hours for Vis. They run about \$6 per person, and \$63 per vehicle.







2

THE ISLAND OF VIS, *the recluse*

The snow-white wedge of goat cheese before me is surrounded by grapes, olives and red peppers. “May I?” Darko (left) asks. I nod. He proceeds to drench the entire plate in the most potent olive oil ever to cross my lips. He tells me he grew or handmade everything I’ll eat tonight. I’m skeptical. Darko senses it. “You want to meet my goat?”

On Vis, a time-capsule island, there are no big hotels. Visitors rent apartments. In the 30-person village of Žena Glava, set amid vineyards, Darko’s 300-year-old stone farmhouse restaurant is a tough find even for locals. Darko likes it that way. He mentions hosting groups of 30, alone. It’s a staggering thought. He is farmer, host, waiter, chef and busboy. Tonight, serving a stingray dinner for one (me) has him smiling. “You hear that?” he asks. An animal calls out. “That’s my donkey.”



3

THE ISLAND OF HVAR, *the pageant girl*

These yachts in Hvar Town's harbor (above) are merely bath toys. During summer's high season, the town's population of 4,138 quintuples as megayachts pull in, and their entourages hit the streets ready to party into the early morning hours. But on this fall afternoon, it's hard to fathom how such a quiet community can draw comparisons to Miami's South Beach.

Past the dormant club scene, cobblestone streets wind between Venetian-style buildings constructed 800 years ago. Bell towers preside over red-tiled roofs. The most coveted restaurant tables, lit by candle, line ancient stone alleyways.

Of course, Hvar Island consists of more than Hvar Town. Stari Grad (opposite, top left) is equally beautiful with less pomp. It's

where I find cafes like Kod Damira (top and bottom right) serving champagne infused with the island's fragrant lavender, and where local cuttlefish is grilled in white wine and olive oil. Hvar may be revered as "the St. Tropez of the Eastern Mediterranean," but secluded nooks like Dubovica Beach (bottom left) string the coast, leaving plenty of opportunity to leave the crowds behind.

BE WARNED Croatia's islands make people want to jump out of their clothes. Nude bathing in this region can be traced to Britain's King Edward VIII and Wallis Simpson, his American girlfriend. She took a high-profile birthday-suit plunge off Rab Island in 1936. Just remember, nowadays the Internet is watching.



GOING ONE STEP BEYOND

ISLANDS
WE NEVER
KNEW
world

WHY ADD AN EXTRA LEG TO A LONG TRIP? RIDE WITH US. WE COULDN'T PRONOUNCE THESE ISLANDS TILL WE LANDED ON THEM. AND THE EFFORT WAS WORTH IT.

1. TIKEHAU (from *Papeete, Tahiti*)

A circular ribbon of coral and sand, the Tikehau atoll is but a mere speck poking above the water in the vast Pacific Ocean. There are just two resorts on this atoll 198 miles northeast of Papeete, which means there's nothing but water between Papeete and my overwater bungalow at Pearl Beach Resort. The only noise is from fish splashing below my deck, which sits directly above coral heads. I'm living over a giant tropical aquarium — that I can swim in. **MAKE THE HOP:** Air Tahiti's 55-minute flight connects six days a week. From the airport, the only way to the resort is by boat. — *Zach Stovall*

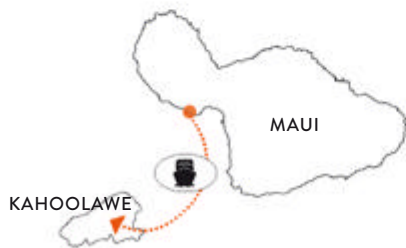




2. KAHOO LAWE (from Maui)

Easy it is not. There's the 7-mile boat ride from Maui. Then there's the dust. And the lack of drinking water. And the unexploded bombs. But we're not at Kahoolawe's real hurdle yet. That would be the year-plus waiting list for visitors. Or more specifically, volunteers. To step foot on Kahoolawe requires that you help heal the island. For decades, it was used by the Navy for bomb tests. Now volunteers of all ages and ethnicities help with the island's recovery — erosion control, tree planting, digging irrigation lines — all while learning about what makes Kahoolawe one of Hawaii's most storied islands.

MAKE THE HOP: Volunteers visit for four-day stints. Permit fees are \$150 and include meals and lodging. kahoolawe.hawaii.gov — Eddy Patricelli



3. ELLESMERE (from Greenland)

Ellesmere Island is a mere 12 miles from neighboring Greenland — if you happen to have a dogsled team and the sea ice is thick. Otherwise reaching the world's 10th largest island involves hopping aboard Adventure Canada's sturdy ship *Ocean Endeavor*. Every summer, it explores Ellesmere Island's rugged coastline, home to ghostly white wolves, miniature caribou and 11-foot-tall polar bears. There's also a stop in the Inuit hamlet of Grise Fiord, the island's only village. Don't expect upscale hotels or concierges who can arrange heated van trips to the ice cap. Instead, you'll take part in local dancing at the community hall and barter directly with carvers for souvenirs. It's summer, so dog sledding is out, but if you're lucky, you can see the latest litter of puppies. **MAKE THE HOP:** Look up Adventure Canada's "Northwest Passage" cruises at adventurecanada.com. — Jad Davenport

FROM LEFT: WESTEND61/GETTY; G. BRAD LEWIS/PHOTO RESOURCE HAWAII; JERRY KOBLENKO/GETTY

4. CHATHAM ISLAND (*from New Zealand*)

The island's remoteness sets in at touchdown after a 450-mile flight from Christchurch. The airport town of Waitangi has a population of 200. When the clock strikes midnight, we'll be the Earth's first humans to welcome a new day. Which reminds me, I must set my watch to the local time zone: forward by 45 minutes. It's different here. Even the birds have distinctive names: Chatham Island parakeets, Chatham Island warblers. Sheep outnumber people, which explains a favorite sport: speed shearing. That and each day's head start are the only signs of a fast pace. **MAKE THE HOP:** It's a 90-minute flight from New Zealand's hubs. — *Brianna Randall*



5. SONORA ISLAND

From Vancouver: 50 minutes by helicopter
The payoff for the ride is a cedar-cloaked and misty beauty deep within the Inside Passage. Only the namesake luxury resort resides here — and black bears and bald eagles.

6. ROTA

From Guam: 40 miles
Rota's caverns and natural pools contrast with Guam's barrenness, and the deer herds and sparse vehicles attest to its being "the peaceful island" among the Northern Marianas. Maybe that's why everyone waves.

7. CALDEY ISLAND

From Wales: 3 miles
A small ferry started coming to Caldey 50 years ago, after a group of monks claimed the island. They make soap for the gift shop but remain unseen. Don't miss the ferry back to Tenby — there are no rooms here.

story by SHAWN BEAN photos by JON WHITTLE



SQUID ZOMBIE. RUSSIAN PENAL COLONY. BEAR RE
MOST UNUS



ISLANDS
WE NEVER
KNEW
asia

PELLENT. RAW JAPAN. WELCOME TO THE WORLD'S

UAL CRUISE.



IF YOU'RE CURIOUS

The main island of Hokkaido is Japan at its most natural, and is central to an archipelago of 509 islands. The population density is five times less than Japan's average. Of the 26 major cruise lines, just three travel to Hokkaido, and Princess is the only one to reach all of the cities on the map above. The nine-day cruise we took for this story starts at \$1,199 per person. Bring warm clothes and an adventurous appetite.

IF YOU'RE SERIOUS

Take a nonstop flight on Japan Airlines from New York to Tokyo (it's a 14-hour flight, starting at \$1,282). Consider upgrading to a premium economy seat on the plane: touch-screen TV, AC power outlet and reclining seat with footrest. The ship departs from Yokohama, an hour-and-a-half drive from the airport.

THE TREBLE HOOK JERKS through a waist-high tank filled with two-dozen squids, each the length of a grown man's forearm. A young Japanese boy grips the fishing rod. Every few seconds he looks over his shoulder at his father, a grinning man holding a Sony camcorder. The boy looks at the father, the father at the boy, the boy at the squids, the squids at something other than their reality: a starring role at the Asaichi (morning market) in Hakodate, Japan, where passengers from a nearby ship have wandered over to watch the squid be transformed into a zombie.

The market is like a choreographed street carnival. Elderly *obaachan* (grandmas) present Aomori apples and minke-whale nuggets. Tourists hand over yen and make a bow.

A fin has been hooked. The boy pulls a squid from the tank, and a jet of water shoots from its siphon — *ssssffff!* The man in the blue apron glides a 6-inch blade through the squid's body and lays its filleted mantle flat on the cutting board like a bearskin rug. The knife slices off the head. With severed nerves firing, the head rises up on arms and tentacles, a cephalopod on Baryshnikov in fourth position. A few more slices, and the father and son are served squid sashimi. I hear that the fresh pieces literally move in your mouth.

Oh, wait. I'm sorry. This is supposed to be a story about a cruise.

Oh, wait. I'm sorry. This *is* a story about a cruise. It's just that the Hokkaido itinerary on *Diamond Princess* isn't very cruise-ish. It is quite simply the most unusual trip I've ever embarked upon.

DURING THE PAST DECADE, A NEW KIND of cruise has been on the rise, far from the rumrunners flowing at Port Cozumel and Disney's Castaway Cay. Since 2008, Asia's share of the worldwide cruising market has grown 300 percent, according to the Cruise Lines International Association. That sounds epic, until put into perspective:

The share increased from 1 percent to 3 percent. By comparison, the Caribbean owns 34 percent of the market.

Japan is a nation of islands — nearly 7,000 of them — and deep history of samurai and shogunates. As recently as the early 20th century, Hokkaido, Japan's second largest island, remained an isolated panorama of fir and cedar, sulfur springs and volcanic lakes.

"A lot of Hokkaido refuses to let mankind approach," says Yokohama resident Norio Hasegawa, on his first cruise with wife, Fumiko. "We don't know the full view of Hokkaido." In a way, it's Japan's Alaska.

Modern Hokkaido began to take shape with the arrival of American urban planners and engineers slightly more than a century ago. This is probably why its towns of today are reminiscent of early suburban America. When I look over the Kushiro cityscape — low-rise buildings at the foot of grassy seaside cliffs — I see Flint, Michigan, with Maui's backdrop. Of course, the paper lanterns from the Obon festival and the billboards with curvy, colorful *kanji* (Japanese writing) are immediate reminders that I'm 14 hours away from my two sons in Florida.

Princess Cruises saw all of this as an untapped opportunity to claim unheralded, off-the-grid ports, with no competition. That's how I ended up on a 952-foot ship, sleeping in one of the 1,137 cabins, and heading to places named Kushiro, Otaru, Hakodate, Aomori and Korsakov, Russia, destinations I needed a map of a map to locate. Each stop is somewhat crude as cruise ports go. Otaru doesn't greet us with high-rise hotels and theme restaurants, but instead with Jenga-like stacks of Maersk shipping containers. In Korsakov we anchor offshore, and tenders bring us to a small dock with a rickety aluminum ramp. In Kushiro, key tourist information includes what to wear to repel bears in the Kushiro City marshes (a bell, which happens to be available at the observatory gift shop). It doesn't take

IN KUSHIRO I SEE FLINT, MICHIGAN,



Nearly 900 miles north of Tokyo is Kushiro, known mostly for mist, which made this day (above) epic. Seafood along the cruise route is found in the likeliest places, but hot-dog statues and squid tanks appear to be set up just in time for the arrival of tourists.



WITH MAUI'S BACKDROP.



Shopping near the port in Otaru can be strangely private, with markets under the cover of forested hills and balloon lanterns.

long to realize this trip will be a chance to discover an odd find, and to be one myself.

DIAMOND PRINCESS CUTS THROUGH the Sea of Okhotsk: Hokkaido over my shoulder, Siberia due north. The inky blue water and white foam collide like an abstract expressionist painting coming undone. In the ship's three-story atrium, railbirds watch an instrumental quartet cover Neil Diamond and Barry Manilow. Railbirds, as they're known to the staff, are the cruisers who gather along the railings to observe the scheduled activities. They watch hula performances and fruit carvers turning pineapples into owls.

These railbirds may speak Japanese or Chinese or Russian or Portuguese or German. The ship crew adds more to the mix: Indonesian, Balinese, Filipino and European. I'm among the few American passengers. English is the language of signage, public announcements and broken but fail-safe communication, one step above hand gestures.

After a few Stolis and some small talk, Inna from Moldova, the bartender on Deck 7, answers my most crucial questions.

"Is there is a morgue on board?"

"Yes," Inna says, her hair pulled back in a braid. "It can accommodate four people."

"What's the highest number of cruises one passenger has taken with Princess?" I ask, having heard that one passenger on board is on her 100th cruise.

"Five hundred and thirty four."

After a few Awamoris, Okinawan sake made from Thai rice, Herman on Deck 14 provides insight about our next stop: Sakhalin Island, Russia's largest island, where brown bears roam and summer temperatures never rise from the 60s.

"Russians don't smile," Herman says.

AT ONE TIME, 33,000 PEOPLE LIVED ON Sakhalin Island, with 22,000 of them here for incarceration. A former Russian penal colony off the coast of Siberia doesn't seem like the port for a pleasure cruise. Even the Russian immigration officer who greets us is icy. Two well-chlorinated Jacuzzis for eyes. No smile.

Sakhalin Island is tin-roofed homes, with blue jeans hanging from clotheslines by their cuffs. Children sell loaves of bread by the road. Tanks sit under tarps, weeds sprouting through their treads. But this is a Sakhalin Island I see through tinted bus windows. The government-approved tour, led by goateed Zoran, is all business.

"Orthodox church. Ten minutes. No bathroom. Sports arena. Ten minutes. Bathroom." I'm tempted to ask where the cornrow booth is, but Zoran is focused, his index and ring fingers bouncing back and forth as he counts heads on the bus. His preamble continues.

"Lenin statue. Thirty minutes. Bathroom."

Islands Quiz

WHERE AM I FROM?

Boats can be synonymous with their homes. Can you guess which boat belongs to which island?



1



2



3



4



5



6

A. GREECE

The boat designed for sponge divers is now mostly for tourists. The scenery in the Med takes you back to old times (pay no attention to the diesel engine).

C. MENTAWAI

After sitting in a boat barely wide enough for American buttocks, editor Eddy Patricelli came away with bruised hips and a prized paddle for not complaining.

E. NEW ZEALAND

Visitors to the Bay of Islands can take a simulated battle ride on a craft that was once considered among the most intimidating sights in Pacific waters.

B. ALEUTIANS

It's built for hunting in some of the world's most dangerous water, using, of all things, driftwood and animal skins. Locals claim it's faster than most birds.

D. JAMAICA

The simplest of the simple, the material used to build this ride will replenish itself in days. Short of a miracle, it's as close to walking on water as you can get.

F. VIETNAM

In plain English, it's the worst name for a craft. But as far back as 1,700 years ago, it was said to be capable of hauling 700 people and 500,000 pounds of cargo.

Answers: 1D (bamboo raft), 2A (gulet), 3F (junk boat), 4C (dugout canoe), 5B (Aleutian kayak), 6E (Maori war canoe)

THE HERRING ARE LONG GONE NOW. I AM THE NEW INDUSTRY.

At Korsakov's city center, we eat buns filled with pork, potato and garlic. We drink dark Russian beer, and watch a pigeon perch on Lenin's bronze pate. Zoran smiles as we step back onto the bus.

"You were best group so far," he tells me without really looking at me.

"Because of our easygoing nature?"

"You were on time."

FROM THE PEAK OF MOUNT TENGU, IT looks as if a tall glass of asphalt and concrete spilled into the valleys and hillsides, and congealed into a nebulous cityscape. This is Otaru, once home to a booming fishing industry. The herring are long gone now, the result of overfishing.

I am the new industry.

Exhibit A: the gaggle of buff rickshaw drivers lingering near Otaru Canal, where gas lamps and artists selling music boxes create a snow-globe charm. The walk along the canal ends in front of squid boats, their halogen bulbs the size of party balloons (squids are attracted to light).

A taxi driver delivers me to Sushiyadori Street, an aptly named strip of sushi restaurants with plastic sashimi and nigiri replicas displayed in their windows. At Asahi Zushi, the sea urchin resembles construction-cone-colored mayonnaise. The taste is pungent and briny; it's had minimal layovers between the sea and my ramekin of soy.

The walk back to the ship crosses Ironaidori Street, a shopping district where glass bells (an Otaru gift-shop specialty) serve as the soundtrack. Girls in platform shoes and boys in Timberlands browse mutton-flavored caramel and soybean ice cream. Passers-by sample squid from a rotisserie-like spindle shaved into thin curls. Squid is Hokkaido's French fry: everywhere, always.

I stop at a market that's part buffet, part aquarium. Armed with a metal tray and tongs, I browse critters in their tanks. I pinch an abalone, a half-shelled mollusk. Moments later, it's on a grated grill,

moving with the enthusiasm of an old man getting out of bed. The cook adds a dash of soy and a blowtorch. It's the oddest — and best — thing I've eaten, an honor previously held by salty orange mush.

SATO IS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR names in Japan, says our guide Sato.

"Satos and horse droppings are everywhere," he adds, pushing tortoiseshell glasses onto his nose.

Located on the northern tip of Honshu, at the same latitude as New York City and Beijing, Aomori is both buzzing city and rustic refuge. Many of those affected by the nuclear disaster in Fukushima, some 200 miles south, have relocated here. In the winter, snow frames the milky green volcanic lakes and hot springs.

"Japanese cannot live without hot springs," Sato says. "Hot bath in the morning, hot bath in the afternoon, hot bath before dinner, hot bath after dinner." Nudity is not optional. "If you wear bathing suit you are a funny person," he adds.

A lunch that includes grilled sardines and pickled radish is followed by a ride up the Mount Hakkoda Ropeway. On the ascent, a thick fog swallows the gondola long before my ears pop. The perfect view showcased on the brochure has a serious case of glaucoma. It's a cinematic mix of mist and Maries' firs that lean and sway, drunk on constant squalls. This is the home of Japan's legendary snow monsters: Every winter, the heavy snow (an average of 20 feet per year) entombs the trees, turning each into a white monolith.

At the ropeway visitor center, I yawn to open my eustachian tubes. Nearby, a man stands with his camera, no doubt foiled by the weather conditions. A wall-mounted TV scrolls through images of Aomori on clearer days. A lovely photo of Mount Idodake in autumn appears. The man takes a picture of the TV, and exits.

Sometimes normal and predictable can be the most elusive things of all.

 **BEST EXOTIC CRUISES:** islands.com





Photo ops: An artist paints the historic warehouses along Otaru Canal; a boy stands atop a Ha-Go Japanese light tank at Sakhalin Regional Museum; hand-etched wooden plaques in Otaru; shrine at the peak of Mount Tengü.





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Viti Levu, Fiji

HOW TO

MAKE A BFF

IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS THAT SPARK A LIFELONG FRIENDSHIP.

1 GUITAR PICKS

FIJI After a small band on Malolo Island let me jam with them one night, I misplaced their guitar pick — no small misstep on a remote atoll. When I returned home, I mailed off two boxes of guitar picks and knew exactly when the package arrived: Facebook friend requests greeted me from Fiji. Grateful band mates. A pack of guitar picks runs \$3 and is the size of your car's keypad. — *Eddy Patricelli*

2 INSTANT PICS

NIUE A compact printer, smaller than a paperback, produced instant postcard-size prints for the church ladies posing for me on this tiny South Pacific island. Suddenly everyone asked me over for Sunday-night dinner (and please bring the printer). Now, I pack the printer wherever I go. After all, taking photos of locals is one thing. Sharing them is another. — *David Lansing*

3 MOVIES

PITCAIRN Befriending the descendants of pirates and mutineers on the world's most isolated inhabited island starts with movie DVDs in a PAL format. The 48 residents of this South Pacific outpost don't have a movie theater, and they don't do Netflix (streaming costs a fortune). Pack a mix of violent action-adventure for the men, rom-com for the women. — *Jad Davenport*

LOAD UP

RIDE SHARING

Zippering out onto the six-lane *autopista* westbound from Havana in my rented 2007 Hyundai Accent is pure freedom. Except for a bull-drawn cart, I'm all alone on the highway. In fact, I'm all alone in the country. I don't know anyone in Cuba. There's not even an American embassy to call on for help or if I just get lonely (and they're paid to be my friends).

Maybe that's why when I spot a crowd gathered in the shade of an overpass and realize they're hitchhikers, I coast to a stop. Dozens of faces peer in at me. "A lift?" several of them ask.

It turns out that the fall of the Iron Curtain saw Soviet subsidies to Cuba evaporate overnight, taking with them the public transportation system. So this group before me is not spooky drifters thumbing empty highways with cardboard signs reading "anywhere"; these are families piled with shopping bags trying to get back to their homes.

"*Vamonos!*" I say. I could use a friend or two. Or three. Or four. Or five. Within minutes they have managed to squeeze in two couples and their kids in back, two more adults and two infants up front, and half a dozen bags and food baskets in back.

When I pull into the town of Pinar del Rio several hours and dozens of hitchhikers later, I've got countless dinner offers, a few invites to christenings and even a funeral(?), and a page full of email addresses. A touch of the brake was all I needed to find friends in Cuba. — *JD*

PULLING OVER

In Cuba, government vehicles are required to pick up hitchhikers if they have space. There are also designated hitchhiking spots.

LIVE ON

THE “OTHER” CAICOS

BEST FOR: PEOPLE WITH PATIENCE

A magazine contest introduced my husband, Jim, and me to Turks and Caicos. We'd won a six-night stay in Provo from *Caribbean Travel + Life*, and during the trip we tossed around the idea of an island move — doesn't everyone dream a little on a trip? But this time our dream didn't end when we picked up our luggage in the Chicago airport. We began researching and learned we could acquire beachfront on Middle Caicos for a million dollars — not cheap, but a reasonable price for that kind of beach. As I write this, our house is still being built. The beach needs no renovations. **DAILY SNAPSHOT** Say the words Turks and Caicos and most people think of Grace Bay. But that isn't us. We prefer the dramatic shoreline of Mudjin Harbor. Instead of sitting still, we're out learning the local ways. I'm volunteering at a collective that sells straw baskets, hats and bags made by local artisans — they like the fact

that I want to help preserve their culture. Jim hangs with fishermen so he'll be equipped to catch our food, you know, if money ever gets real tight. He's also been experimenting with beer, with plans to open a small-batch brewery. I don't think it will generate enough money to live on, so we'll both keep our IT jobs, which we can do from anywhere in the world, even Middle Caicos. **MOVER BEWARE** Island time is tough to accept when you're trying to build a home. All materials reach us from one bridge, which only recently reopened after hurricane damage ... suffered a decade ago. Worse is the paperwork. We'll submit forms to an office and, typically, only one person processes them. So if he takes a week off, you get nothing for a week. Here, that's normal. Jim and I remind ourselves that we wanted to leave the rat race, and this is what it looks like when no one is racing. — Victoria Frey, as told to Brooke Morton



Middle Caicos is three times the size of Provo, but with a population of just 275 people.

Turks and
Caicos



SARA FORBES
YEARS ON ISLAND
20
MOVED FROM
London, England

MY 3 CENTS

1. When friends visit, they ask, “Where are the trees?” This is not a lush, dense island. It’s the water that’s magical.
2. I’ve learned a lot about TCI by listening to the women, like how their husbands would leave for two or three months to gather conch.
3. You need to wear a few hats to live here. My husband, Daniel, and I operate a cafe, a real-estate brokerage and a crafts co-op.

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MAKE

NO SUDDEN MOVES

BY MARIA YATES



WHERE: THE ROCK OF GIBRALTAR
THE DISCOVERY: CLINGING MONKEYS

“Stay calm,” says the taxi driver, Guillermo, in a hushed tone.

I am frozen with fear in the middle of a concrete lookout high above Gibraltar. Guillermo isn’t moving either. No one is. The camera I had confidently held to my eye just seconds before is now shaking in my hand. Thorny fingernails begin to scrape my scalp. I have a monkey on my back, and I don’t mean in a figurative way.

It all started off well. We’d driven up the precariously sharp incline leading to the Great Siege Tunnels on the north side of Gibraltar, or “the Rock,” a peninsula separated from Spain by an airport runway. Along the way we gawked at spectacular views of the Mediterranean Sea. Africa sat seductively across the Strait of Gibraltar.

At the top of the Rock we found a coveted parking spot. “It must be our lucky day,” said my father. He then announced

before we were even out of the car that he was going for a walk into the tunnel, carved by the British Merchant Marines as a defense system against France and Spain in 1779. It is 32 miles of dank hollow, beckoning tourists to enter.

“Anyone joining me?” Dad asked.

“No,” said my mother. Dad was on his own, but I had a surprise for him. I knew he would walk a short distance and then re-emerge, excited. My plan was to capture his boyish grin as he came back out. I’d positioned myself in just the right spot, the camera raised for the best angle. Ready and waiting for Dad’s triumphant return.

That’s when all my planning came crashing to a halt. The whoomp of something hairy had landed on my shoulders.

“Oh dear God! I have a ... my back ... get it ... help ... it’s ... a monkey!”

My response only adds to the mayhem. Gasps are heard. Everyone stares. My mother looks as shocked as I am. My husband rushes toward me. Guillermo stops him. I’m alone in the center of a circle of stunned tourists, watchful cab drivers and an assortment of clapping, cheering monkeys.

“Do not move,” says Guillermo.

I’d read about the Gibraltar monkeys during the planning stages of the trip. How they arrived in Gibraltar is not entirely known, but they have thrived here for centuries. Everything I read advised against touching them. I hadn’t. I saw them skirt the nearby ledge. I saw them scamper among tourists with sad, begging eyes that said, “Got any treats?” I paid them no attention.

Maybe they were offended by my lack of interest. So much so that they gathered the troop for a quick meeting. A volunteer stepped forward to pick lice off the top of my head.

“You are OK.” Guillermo is the only person who is actually speaking.

“How do I get it off?” I ask, careful not to agitate my furry friend, who must weigh about 10 pounds. It isn’t the weight that bothers me though. It’s those claws. They continue to scrape over my scalp. Worse is the thought that at any moment it might pee on me.

“He will soon jump off,” Guillermo says. I have no choice but to believe him.

I stare at my feet and listen to the sounds of cameras clicking and muffled whispers. Just as I begin to relax and accept my head massage, the monkey jumps off. And now it’s time to let out my true emotions.

“Oh my God!” I yell, writhing my body like a belly dancer. The crowd mills around, buzzing with contained laughter and fingers pointed my way. A familiar voice overpowers the noise.

“What’s going on?” It’s Dad, his usual cheerful face replaced with a brow rippled like a Ruffle. He missed the entire episode. And I missed my shot.

TAKE AN EXOTIC 60-SECOND GETAWAY: islands.com/videos

TIME OUT
Gibraltar’s 30 most mischievous monkeys were recently sent to a safari park in Scotland. The Gibraltar environmental minister calls them “ambassadors.”

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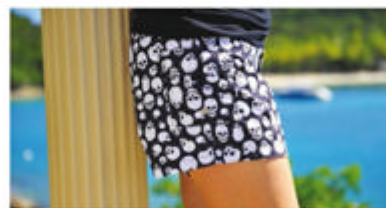
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WHAT NOBODY TELLS YOU ABOUT ...

Nandana Villa, Grand Bahama

ASIA (REALLY) CLOSE

Thai architecture, Burmese teak, Javanese doors — this Asian-style mansion is more than a nod to the Far East. I'm 65 miles from Miami, and my villa's giant teak walls slide open — blurring indoor and outdoor space.

The only thing Asian that's missing is jet lag.

**SPA SAFARI
YEP, THERE'S A
SPA. BUT THIS
IS NANDANA.
THE SPA IS IN A
2,000-SQUARE-
FOOT INDIAN
SAFARI TENT.**

OVERWATER VILLAS?

The property's five villas (*bangalas*) don't sit on stilts. But Nandana's 120-foot infinity pool does wrap around two villas to inspire an overwater vibe. And unlike in Tahiti, there's no need to wash off the salt water. *From \$9,000 a night for six people, nandanavilla.com*

STORY AND PHOTO BY EDDY PATRICELLI

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